

Vineyard Owner Won't Let Skeptics Crush His Dream

Resident determined to grow difficult grape variety

By MORAG MACLACHLAN

David Lowry doesn't take "no" for an answer. After living in California for 25 years and operating a small vineyard there, Lowry returned to Duxbury wanting to continue his passion for producing wine at his Standish Street home. But Lowry was told Massachusetts' cold climate would prevent any wine enthusiast from producing a Merlot wine.

"I wanted to grow a Merlot," Lowry said. "But I

was told New England was too cold for a red because there was frost in May and October."

Plymouth Winery owner Linda Shumway said Massachusetts' climate and soil make it difficult to grow red grapes.

"It's tricky to grow red," she said. "I do know of a man in Lincoln who has grown Pinot Noir. But it's much easier in France or California."

continued on page 6



David Lowry holds a bucket full of grapes he hopes will allow him to produce bottles of Merlot.



Lowry's friends and family helped him harvest his crop.

Bonita Oehlke of the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources said in a phone interview on Monday that she knew of only one commercial vineyard in the state that had successfully grown a Merlot. The website of the Cape Cod Winery in East Falmouth lists the Merlot variety as one of six varieties that grow well on Cape Cod.

"It's a tough grape for this area," Oehlke said.

Determined, Lowry embarked on a series of temperature tests. After a year of studying the conditions

around his property, he found a spot that didn't produce frost in May or October because of the warmth from the water of Duxbury Bay.

"We're actually on the same latitude as Rome," Lowry said. "I found a small microclimate on my property."

Once Lowry found a climate friendly spot, he had to narrow that area even further and locate suitable soil. Once fertile soil was found that had sufficient drainage, Lowry had to decide what variety of grapes to cultivate. He planted one-year-old Merlot vines four years ago.



Lowry's vineyard has been growing for the past four years in his Standish Street backyard.

To ensure he would grow the best crop, Lowry hand selected the best grapes. He cut production by 50 percent by pruning and thinning out grapes that weren't as mature as other plants in the bunch. Lowry said he lost five percent of his crop due to heavy rain earlier in the season.

A couple of weeks ago, Lowry and his friends gathered along the shore at his seaside vineyard to harvest the grapes. With their help, Lowry picked the remaining grapes, filling large yellow crates with the fruity bunches.

The dark purple berries were then poured into a crusher/destemmer designed to remove the crops' stems and crush the grapes. This process also produced a juice. Lowry used a refractometer to measure its sugar content.

"Sugar is what gives you the alcohol content," Lowry said, taking a sip of the juice and smiling at the sweet, sugary taste.

Now, the waiting game begins. Lowry will allow the grapes to ferment. Yeast will be added to the fruit and the

primary fermentation process will last three to four weeks. During this time, the sugar will turn to alcohol.

The grapes skins will then be squished in a press. This will draw out any remaining juices. This juice will then be left for three months undergoing a second fermentation. Lowry said any leftover solids will settle to the bottom during this process.

After this three month period, the wine will be poured into barrels to age. In a couple of years, Lowry hopes to pop the cork on his first bottle of wine. He hopes to produce 15 cases or 180 bottles.

"It's a great project," said Lowry's daughter Lina Verderese.

"It's exciting," Lowry's wife Patti said. "David has been waiting for years to do this."

"I'm not doing this for a profit," Lowry said. "I will give the wine as a gift to friends and use it to trade my friends in the oyster business for some oysters if it is good enough."

While he waits for his grapes to transform into a refreshing Merlot, Lowry will take what he has learned along the way and tweak his bayside vineyard.

"I'm going to lay black plastic down between the rows of vines next spring to keep them warm and accelerate growth," he said.